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Exile and Alienation in the Poetry of the Early Southern *Mahjar*

ومن يكون غريباً في مواطنه
لا بدع إن أنكرته الأرض والشهب[1]

During the two decades before and after the turn of the twentieth century the Levant witnessed a mass exodus unprecedented in its history. Famines, political violence, oppression and in general the severe socio-economical crisis the Ottoman Empire suffered during the last years of its existence drove substantial numbers into exile, above all members of the Christian confessions.[2] At the same time the shores of far away lands bore the promise of a new life of freedom and economical prosperity, often triggered by the agents of shipping companies. The principal destiny of the Levantine – as well as European – immigrants in those years were the U.S.A. and Canada, followed by Latin America, Australia and to a lesser degree West Africa. Due to a lack of records, especially in the early years, it is difficult to estimate the scale of this migration. Typically, the immigrants from the Middle East worked as merchants of imported goods and, as in many other parts of the world, their story was one of great success. Well-working family structures as well as an eagerness to find a better life in the "new world" stimulated the establishment of social communities with a high reputation, political and economic power and an impressive cultural life. In contemporary Latin American literature the Levantine trader still constitutes the typical Arab, or "Turco", as they are usually called. We come across these figures in Gabriel García Márquez' *El amor en los tiempos del cólera* as well as in Milton Hatoum's *Relato de um certo Oriente*. The migration from the Levant turned out to be

1 "If somebody lives in a foreign place it is not surprising if earth and stars also consider him a stranger." From: *Amānī muhājir* ("Wishes of an Immigrant") by Fawzī al-Maʿlūf. I am grateful to Magnus Ryan for correcting the English version of this article.

2 Karpat (1985); Hourani/Shehabi (1992).

decisive not only for the development of the host countries, but also for shaping the identity of the Lebanese as a global community.

Already during the early years of Arab presence in the Americas many immigrants engaged in publishing activities. Apart from being a means of communication for the local communities, these publications offered an opportunity for the newcomers to continue their literary traditions and at the same time – under the influence of their host cultures – develop a new tradition, the so-called *adab al-mahjar* ("exile literature"), often also referred to as Arabic Romantic literature.[3] The intellectual life of Arabs in exile was influenced by two currents. On the one hand it was under the sway of the so-called Arab Renaissance *(nahḍa)*. Spiritualist approaches to the nature of the human soul for example are characteristic of many texts of the *mahjar* literature, and similar discussions were led in newspapers in the Arab world. These concerns betray general tendencies of a new Neo-Platonism and freemasonry which were popular among Arab intellectuals at that time (Hourani 1962: 246sqq.). Another element which *nahḍa* and exile literature have in common is – connected with the downfall of the Ottoman Empire – a new rise of Arab nationalism and pride in Arab history and culture. The second important source of inspiration for the poets of the *mahjar* was European literature the Arab Romantics became acquainted with during their education at missionary schools or later in their host countries. Meanwhile Blake, Keats, and Shelley enjoyed popularity among the poets of the North American *mahjar* (Abdel-Hai 1980), Baudelaire, Musset and other French poets were read in the South.

According to the Arab Romantics and similar to European models, the contents of a poem should have the primacy over its form. They rejected the artificial use of a never-changing corpus of classical topoi and unusual words prevailing in classical Arabic poetry,[4] as well as the concept of the poet who composes his verses above all to please and praise his patron. The Romantic poet shared with the Neoclassic poet (e.g. Ahmad Shawqī) the idea of the poet as an advocate for his

3 al-Naʿūrī ([3]1977); Ostle (1992); ʿAbd al-Dāʾim (1993); Scheffold (1993).

4 The Romantics as well as later poets were often quite harsh in their criticism and did not take into consideration the enormous developments which separate pre-Islamic Bedouin poetry from the poetry composed at the early Abbasid courts, not to mention Arabic poetry in the Mamluk or Ottoman era.

nation in political contexts. A new aspect was the concept of the Romantic genius which is reminiscent of the pre-Islamic *shāʿir*. According to this concept, the Romantic poet is distinguished by a singular emotional sensitivity which allows him access to a superior sphere of reality and to travel between the ordinary people's material world and the divine realm. With his exceptional insights the poet is able to develop a vision of the authentic in a corrupt world. As for the European Romantics, the aesthetically, the ethically, the spiritually and the politically authentic often converged. Likewise, in both traditions nature plays the role of a mediator between these opposed spheres. In Neoplatonic terms it is an emanation of the divine, and in terms of epistemology it serves as an object of contemplation and as a gate to the cognition of the superior sphere. In Arabic literature this role of nature is, with a few exceptions,[5] unique to Romanticism.

In general textbooks on Arabic literature little attention is usually paid to *mahjar* Romanticism which is often regarded as an unimportant prelude to modern Arabic literature. Sometimes it is even ridiculed for a certain naive spiritualism and an exaggerated self-pity which can be found in several examples of *mahjar* literature. However, regarding the entire genre in those terms would do it injustice. In particular the literature of the Southern *mahjar* has remained largely unexplored in spite of the continual popularity of poets like Rashīd Salīm al-Khūrī ("al-Shāʿir al-Qarawī") or Ilyās Farḥāt in the Middle East. Another member of this generation of Arab poets was Fawzī al-Maʿlūf[6] who in what follows will serve as an example to describe general features of the poetry of the Southern *mahjar*.

Fawzī al-Maʿlūf was born in 1899 in Zahlé, a Lebanese town in the Bekaa valley predominantly inhabited by Christians. In his family, which included several other *mahjar* poets, Fawzī al-Maʿlūf became familiar with classical Arabic poetry. During his time at the Catholic Collège Oriental in Zahlé (1909-1913) he is supposed to have composed his first pieces of poetry which are not preserved. His further

5 The Abbasid poet Ibn al-Rūmī (836-896) and certain examples of mystical and Andalusian poetry, cf. Schmidt (1971).

6 Aoun (1939); ʿAbd al-Shāhid (1971); Akasoy (2002). The primary sources used for this article were published *post mortem* as *Dīwān Fawzī al-Maʿlūf* (al-Maʿlūf 1957). ʿAbd al-Shāhid included in the appendix of his book some additional poems published in different magazines.

education at the École des Frères in Beirut was interrupted by the beginning of the First World War which forced the young poet to return to his native city. During those years he translated some pieces of French literature and wrote the drama *Ibn Ḥāmid* on the fall of Granada[7] and two short novels. In 1919 Fawzī followed his father to Damascus where he encountered a more nationalistic atmosphere than in Beirut. Some political ideas he expresses in his exile poetry might result from this time. Only two years later the young poet had to leave Damascus and once again followed his father, this time to join his uncle Qayṣar in São Paulo. The reasons for his emigration have never been adequately explained. Some authors assumed an unhappy love to be the main reason whereas others suggested a pressure to realise his literary talent or, more generally, the depressing atmosphere in the Levant caused by the new foreign rule after the end of the Ottoman dominion. Maʿlūf's political poems give evidence of a certain ambiguity of motives, as we shall see later. When Fawzī al-Maʿlūf arrived in Brazil in 1921, he encountered a well established Lebanese community there. He integrated himself successfully into their cultural, social and economic circles and became a respected member of the community, but he died in 1930, two years before the *ʿUṣbah Andalusiyyah (Andalusian League)* was founded, a literary circle similar to the famous *Rābiṭah Qalamiyyah (Pen Club)* in New York.

Among the recurrent themes of Maʿlūf's poetry is a strong feeling of exile and alienation which affects several layers of the poet's self. The most obvious layer is the exile from Lebanon. None of Maʿlūf's poems contains a description of his new Brazilian home, let alone one which gives evidence of a new positive source of inspiration.[8] Most of the poems in which Maʿlūf deals with his exile emphasise the painful longing for the Levant, declarations of loyalty, and obstacles to these feelings of affection and longing. Another layer of alienation is the

7 For al-Andalus as a historical utopia in modern Arabic literature cf. Nijland (1987), Martínez Montávez (1992), Akasoy (2002: 29sqq.).

8 This absence of descriptions of the place of exile is not uncommon in Arabic poetry. It is typical of the first generation of *mahjar* poets who did not expect to remain in exile, but it applies also to the Neoclassic poet Aḥmad Shawqī who spent several years of exile in Spain. His poems on Spanish items, however *(The New al-Andalus, Andalusiyyah, Journey to al-Andalus)*, deal with the glorious Moorish past and hardly contain references to contemporary Spain (cf. Boudot-Lamotte 1977: 53sqq.).

Romantic's feeling of exile in the material world and his eternal quest for the authentic. In what follows, I will discuss these two cases of alienation using as examples the poem *The Empty Lions' Thicket* and the poetical cycle *On the Carpet of the Wind*.

1. Political Alienation: *The Empty Lions' Thicket*

Maʿlūf composed *The Empty Lions' Thicket (al-Masʾada al-khāliya)*[9] in 1921 when he left Lebanon for Brazil. The poem begins with an invocation of the pain the poet suffers by being separated from his homeland. The motives Maʿlūf uses are borrowed from the *nasīb* of early Arabic poetry, i.e. the first part of the *qasīdah* in which the poet laments the departure of the beloved (II. 1-3):

اطلق لمدمعك العنان وخله يهمي إلى أن ينتهي بنفاد
Let go the reins of your tear duct and leave it so that it pours until it runs dry.

ودع الضلوع تذيبها نيرانها حتى تجللها بثوب رماد
Let the fire melt the ribs until they are clad in a garment of ashes.

وأترك جواك وشأنه يقضي على ما فيك باق من حطام فؤاد
Let your passion annihilate what has remained of the rubble of your heart.

In the first part of the poem Maʿlūf demonstrates both his familiarity with classical Arabic poetry and his own contribution to this tradition, an intense emotional language. He also sets the stage for the political message he conveys in this piece. The first impression we get of the poet is that of a victim. The fact that Maʿlūf refers exclusively to his emotions deprives his possible critics of any opportunity to question his role as a victim and reproach him for abandoning his fatherland for base motives. In the next part of the poem the poet invokes the memory of a paradisiacal homeland which offered emotional comfort as well as poetical inspiration (ll. 7-8):

أيام كنت به وعيشك زاهر وهواك بسام وفكرك هادي
When you were there your life was beaming, your mood smiling and your thought calm.

9 al-Maʿlūf (1957: 25-28), German translation in Akasoy (2002: 288-291).

تتصيد اللذات بين رياضه وعلى جفونك نشوة الصياد
Delights chased over its meadows and on your eyelids was the drunkenness of a hunter.

In this part Maʿlūf leaves the exclusively inner sphere and makes use of a different point of reference, the memory of himself in his homeland which implies a more ample context than the poet's innermost emotional state. A noteworthy aspect of this description is that whenever Maʿlūf describes Lebanon in terms of the Garden of Eden, it is never inhabited.[10] He rather invokes an existential and very intimate, almost maternal relationship with his home. By describing himself as a favoured, nourished and blessed son of Lebanon, Maʿlūf provides himself with a sound background to present his political claims. As soon as other people enter the stage, the description of Maʿlūf's homeland becomes critical or at least ambiguous. In the following lines of *The Empty Lions' Thicket* Maʿlūf combines this powerful emotional language of longing with a description of the motives for migration which reinforce his role as a victim (II. 13-15):

أشتاقه شوق المحب إلى الهوى مهما أرى فيه من ايستبداد
I long for my homeland with a lover's passion, whatever despotism I see there.

وأحبه بالرغم عما نالني منه وأمحضه صحيح ودادي
I love it in spite of what reaches me from there, and I declare that I truly love it.

مهما يجر وطني علي وأهله فالأهل أهلي والبلاد بلادي
No matter how much my homeland and my people have wronged me, because its people are my people and this land is my land.

With these lines we get a taste of Maʿlūf's general attitude in his political poems, a sometimes rather vague criticism of the state of political oppression, misery and injustice. A paradox which arises from the contrast of the paradisiacal homeland and the crisis of separation is that with the departure from his home the poet is bereft of his unique source of inspiration. But, as becomes clear from the following lines, this loss is at least partly compensated by the deep feeling of grief (I. 16):

10 For the homeland described as Paradise Lost and object of criticism for contemporary political conditions cf. Nijland (1989).

أرثي لبؤسهم فأندب حالهم بفمي وأرثي حظهم بمدادي
I grieve over their misfortune and bewail their condition with my mouth, and I deplore their fate with my ink.

In the final part of the poem Maʿlūf repeats his declarations of loyalty and avows that all criticism directed against his compatriots stems from honest intentions. Nevertheless, his words are harsh when he reaches his concrete reproaches (ll. 22-24):

واستعذبوا ذل القيود فأصبحوا يتفاخرون بنير الاستعباد
They enjoyed the shame of the bonds and began to praise themselves for their slavery.

وغدا به لبنان بعد عجيجه بالأسد مأسدة بلا آساد
By way of this, Lebanon became an empty lions' thicket after having roared with the lions.

هم ضيعوا إرث الجدود فنالهم غضب الجدود ولعنة الأحفاد
They destroyed the ancestors' heritage, and therefore they meet the ancestors' fury and the descendants' curse.

In particular this last line bears a serious reproach. As the poet himself demonstrates in his poems about historical themes like Baalbak, the Phoenicians and Granada,[11] the glorious times of the past are a constitutive part of his identity. As for the representatives of the *nahḍa* as well as for the European Romantics, a nation's cultural legacy has an almost sacred status and imposes a heavy responsibility on the modern upholders. The description of Lebanon as Paradise Lost furthermore constitutes a parallel to love poetry with its idealised past and criticised present, except that the past in love poetry is an individual one, whereas the historical past is collective. The reproaches also reveal a different layer of political alienation Maʿlūf experienced even before his migration. Lebanon is denied its existence in an appropriate condition since its people in their disorientation even support foreign rule.

With this second, political, description of Lebanon Maʿlūf creates a clear contrast between the authentic land of his memory which is pure and paradisiacal on the one hand, and on the other hand the corrupted land of a society which is not authentic, but guided by misperceptions. The way this society treats their land corresponds to the

11 Two of these poems are not Maʿlūf's original compositions: *Oh Granada!* is based on the Spanish poet Francisco Villaespesa's *Elegía, The Phoenicians* is a translation of a poem by the Brazilian Olavo Bilac (cf. Akasoy 2002: 128sqq.).

way it treats the poet, the herald of their land's inner voice. Yet, in the final lines of *The Empty Lions' Thicket* one might perceive a certain self-criticism of Maʿlūf when he declares (I. 26):[12]

لكن أنفت بأن أعيش بموطني عبداً وكنت به من الأسياد

But I rejected living as a slave in my homeland where I once belonged to its masters.

The poem ends with a reference to the poet's emotional situation and his physical condition as a traveller on the sea. It gives a last impression of Maʿlūf's conflicting feelings and mutually exclusive wishes (l. 28):

البحر تحتي واللظى في أضلعي والماء من حولي وقلبي صادي

Under me is the ocean, and between my ribs a blazing fire, there is water around me, but my heart is thirsty.

In *The Empty Lions' Thicket* Maʿlūf presents both an apology and an attack. His argumentative strategy is carefully developed. In choosing his innermost emotional condition as a starting point, Maʿlūf creates the ground for an interpretation of his situation which can hardly be challenged and which serves at the same time as a basis for his political criticism. In *Amānī muhājir* ("Wishes of an Immigrant"),[13] another poem written at the time when the poet left Lebanon, Maʿlūf proceeds in a similar way by conveying a political message in the context of an account of his situation as an expatriate. He also begins with a description of his suffering, but when he turns to the political criticism he includes himself among those who are criticised for their failure. Also, unlike *The Empty Lions' Thicket*, *Wishes of an Immigrant* contains a passionate plea for a solution to Lebanon's numerous problems:

تالله لا نرتقي إلا متى اتحدت تلك المآذن في الأوطان والقبب

By God, we will not advance unless the minarets and domes (of Christian churches) in our homes are united.

12 This self-criticism is more explicit in *Wishes of an Immigrant*. There, Maʿlūf blames himself for having abandoned his fatherland: "Had it not been for a deceiving strife for superiority, by God, I would not have left their territory for distant lands".

13 The *Dīwān* contains only an abbreviated version (Maʿlūf 1957: 30-32). A complete version is available in the appendix to ʿAbd al-Shāhid (1971: 22-24).

ولنكرم العلم أيا كان مصدره فإنه للتآخي والعلى سبب
Let us honour knowledge wherever it comes from because it leads to fraternisation and sublimity.

لا دين للعلم في الدنيا ولا وطن فالعلم كالنور لم تحصر به ترب
In this world knowledge has neither confession nor homeland, because knowledge is like the light which is not restricted to a place.

ولتستعد لغة الضاد التي دعيت أم اللغات شباباً برده قشب
May the language of *Ḍād* (= Arabic) which was once called the mother of languages regain its youth in a new garment.

إن لم نكن كلنا في أصلنا عرباً فنحن تحت لواها كلنا عرب
If not all of us have Arab roots, we are all Arabs under the banner of this language.

As in other political poems composed on particular occasions, often the death of a respected personality, Fawzī al-Maʿlūf appears as an ardent partisan of Arab nationalism. Despite the spiritualist concerns and a critical attitude to rationalism revealed in other cases, his support of secular enlightenment in the political poems is by no means uncommon for a Romantic poet and can also be detected in the European models.

2. Spiritual Alienation: *On the Carpet of the Wind*

Rather than the memory of the idealised home, the trauma of exile constitutes the prevailing theme of Maʿlūf's spiritualistic poetry. The poet's spiritual alienation is even more fundamental than the loss of identity caused by exile and foreign rule of his homeland. It is the Romantic poet's essential alienation from the spiritual home of all mankind. Whereas the vast majority of human beings are ignorant of their origins, the Romantic poet is endowed with an exceptional sensitivity which allows him to feel both the pain of separation from the spiritual home and the bliss of re-approaching it. In Romantic poetry nature serves as a mediating sphere between the corrupt world of human society and the spiritual home. It is to nature that the poet in Maʿlūf's poetry retreats, seeking isolation from human corruptness and contemplation of the pure and authentic. His spiritualistic poems reveal a notion of strangeness which occupies a more important position in Khalil Jibran's works (Naimy 1974; Dahdah 1997) than it does in Maʿlūf's. Fawzī Maʿlūf's best known work, the cycle *On the Carpet*

of the Wind (ʿAlā bisāṭ al-rīḥ),[14] describes the poet's journey from the material to the spiritual world in fourteen cantos. In this cycle one can discover some of the most important features of Maʿlūf's poetry which are sometimes also characteristic of early *mahjar* poetry in general.

On the Carpet of the Wind begins with a description of the poet as "a king in the air". The heavenly spheres are not only his true home, but he rules there. The clouds are his throne, darkness his shawl and the Pleiades his sceptre. As in European Romantic poetry it is the night, Ludwig Tieck's "mondbeglänzte Zaubernacht" *(Wunder der Liebe)* or Joseph von Eichendorff's famous "Mondnacht", which offers the opportunity for an access or a return to this super-material realm (Abdel-Hai 1975). There the poet governs not with physical force, but with the power of his fantasy and his poetry. The superiority of the heavenly spheres is evident not only from their inhabitants' reverence for the poet, but also from its physical appearance. Eagles, stars, the Muse, and spirits inhabit a realm of pleasant smells, dreams and eternity, symbolising a sensual, spiritual and metaphysical excellence which distinguishes this place from the material world. The poet-king however is in an ambiguous situation as a being which consists in part of flesh and bones and thereby partly belongs to the material world:

هو منها وليس منها فما زال غريباً ما بين أبناء أمه

He is part of the earth and not part of it, and he continues being a stranger among his mother's children.[15]

In the second canto *(The Spirit of the Poet)* the language of political power turns into one of metaphysics with the description of a supernatural power which might be identified as the poets' collective spirit as well as the Neoplatonic world-soul. In this cosmological scheme poetry is a manifestation of the divine, but even more so has itself a powerful impact:

14 al-Maʿlūf (1958). The Portuguese version by Venturelli Sobrinho (*No Tapete do Vento, Poema árabe por Fauzi Maluf*, Rio de Janeiro 1931) gives evidence of Maʿlūf's popularity in Brazil which went beyond the Arab community (cf. Akasoy 2002: 208-225, 248-287).

15 William Chittick describes a similarly ambiguous state of being and not being for the great Islamic mystic Ibn ʿArabī (cf. Chittick 1989).

وفتى الشعر فيه يستنزل الوحي بياناً يجثو الخلود لديه
The young man of poetry invokes the inspiration as a revelation before which eternity bends its knee.

The poet-prophet creates the material world which appears as a reflection of his emotions:

ما ندى الفجر غير لؤلؤ دمع رشفته الأزهار من محجريه
What is the morning's dew if not the pearls of his tears the blossoms drew from his eyes.

وبريق النجوم غير شظايا كأس حب تحطمت في يديه
And what is the radiance of the stars, if not splinters of a glass of love which broke in his hands.

The third canto *(The Slave)* bears a strong resemblance to Maʿlūf's political poetry. It contains a dramatic portrait of the poet as a slave of the laws of corporeality who suffers from the fundamental discrepancy of his bound body and his free spirit. Similarly, the patriot suffers from his people's misguided existence as blind slaves. Both are caught in a dilemma of multiple impediments and dependencies which have in common an almost deliberate submission to agony:

عبد عصر من التمدن نلهو ضلة عن لبابه بقشوره
I am a slave of an epoch of civilisation, and we enjoy its vainness while removing ourselves from its best part.

عبد حبي أنزلته في فؤادي فكوى أضلعي بنار سعيره
I am a slave of my love which I let descend into my heart, and my ribs burnt through its burning flame.

This situation of the poet is reminiscent of the conflicting images of the immigrant: even though the poet in *On the Carpet of the Wind* possesses a body, he is not entirely subjected to the laws of the material world. He remains in a state between both worlds which allows him to understand his condition as a material being. Despised and underestimated by the common people, the poet is not capable of applying these insights to his life as a member of a social or political community. As long as he remains in this society, he has no choice than to support, continue and perpetuate these conditions. Similarly in Maʿlūf's political poetry the poet's position remains ambiguous. He complains and suffers, but at the same time he is consciously part of the problem. But here as well he does not have the power to improve the situation since the people neither appreciate his poetical talent nor

his metaphysical, ethical and politico-historical insights. Temporary and limited relief is granted by a retreat to nature or exile. In both cases the only comfort is the poet's free spirit which travels without any physical impediments to the poet's true home, the heavenly spheres or the paradisiacal Lebanon of his memory.

The fourth canto *(Dream and Reality)* emphasises the material character of the poet's journey and reveals the comical dimension of Maʿlūf's poetry. Not fantasy alone carries the poet's body to the place "where his spirit lives without his body". It is the birds and, most curiously, an "aircraft on the back of the wind". Maʿlūf showed his fascination with this new means of transportation already in his short poem *The Samkh Disaster* (published 1924) which deals with the first plane crash in Ottoman history.[16] In *On the Carpet of the Wind* he describes his miraculous machine as:

هي طير من الجماد كأن الجن في صدرها تحثّ خيولا
A bird made of inanimate matter as if a jinn in its chest spurred on horses.

With the fourth canto the stage of *On the Carpet of the Wind* is set and its various dimensions are laid out. In the fifth canto *(Among Birds)* the poet arrives to the lowest sphere of the sky which is inhabited by the birds which react primarily to the terrifying outer appearance of the poet. An eagle wonders what sort of creature this is:

يا له طائراً بصورة شيطان يبثّ اللهيب بركان صدره
He has a bird in a devil's shape, and the volcano in his chest sends out flames.

Another bird realises they are facing the visit of a human being. Close as they live to the earth, the birds are left in no doubt about the character of these creatures and fear the conquest of their realm:

آدمي هذا أجاب أخوه جاء يستعمر الأثير بأسره
This is a human, his brother answered, who came to inhabit the entire ether.

16 al-Maʿlūf (1957: 23-24). Further examples of Maʿlūf's much neglected humoristic poetry are *O Nights of Mud, When Does the Morning Come*, a parody on love poetry where he describes himself as stuck in the mud of Damascus' Bāb Tūmā, *The Vendor of Love*, a negative inversion of the description of the beloved directed to a prostitute, and *The Cigarette*, which compares this object with the beloved (cf. Akasoy 2002: 52sqq.).

كرة الأرض عن مطامعه ضاقت فحطت هنا مطامح فكره

The earth has become too narrow for all his purposes, so that his desires settle here.

The birds decide to attack the poet who defends himself with declarations of his pure intentions. He came to delight the birds with his poetry and left the earth for the same reasons as they did, to escape the pain caused by its inhabitants. This defensive speech is continued in the sixth canto *(Signs of Pain)* in which the poet portrays the life in the material world to the birds and describes how poetry is the only way for him to take relief from this existential dilemma. In accordance with the impact of poetry described in the second canto, the poet's soul discovers paradise in its quest for the phantasmagorical. The muddy rivers of the material world turn into the *Salsabil*, the river of Islamic paradise, and the poet fills the heavenly sphere with a song which is perceived by humans as a religious revelation.

In the seventh canto *(Close to the Stars)* the poet's confrontation with the birds is repeated when he reaches the next sphere, which is inhabited by the stars. Again, the first star wonders what sort of creature has entered their realm, and the second star identifies him as an inhabitant of a planet named Earth which is full of misery. But since these beings are unable to sustain themselves in the upper spheres the second star recommends no attack. In this and the following canto *(Scattered Leaves)* the poet addresses one of the stars as the star he had been talking to in his lonely nights in the gardens and begs for the star's sympathy. The comfort the star and his poetry have given to the poet proved to be vanishing illusions ousted by pain:

ورجاء حبكته من خيوط النور لم ينسدل عليه ظلام

Which hope have you woven out of threads of light which darkness did not descend on?

ونشيد وقعته للتأسي لم يعكره بالأنين الغرام

Which song you have sung as a comfort has not been blurred by the sigh of ardent desire?

In the ninth canto *(In the World of the Spirits)* the poet meets the third party, the spirits. Like the birds and the stars they react to the poet's arrival with curiosity and approach him in order to find out what kind of being he is and where he comes from. At first the poet hears their whispers and senses their windy touches. He understands only after a

while their whispered words which are the contents of the tenth canto *(A Handful of Dust)*. Like with the inhabitants of the lower spheres, a first spirit appears demanding the poet's expulsion. Even though there is no need to be afraid of him, as a being of clay and water he does not belong to their sphere. His body depends on the principles of generation and corruption, and so does his power on earth. This spirit's speech describes the poet's existence in the material world in clear contrast to the version of the second canto. According to the spirit a human's death bears more advantages than his life. The decay of a body offers at least nutrition to the plants. The idea of death as life appears frequently in Maʿlūf's poetry, but is usually rendered in terms of a disposal of physical bounds and the birth of the free spiritual self.

In the eleventh canto *(Deceptive Progress)* another spirit deepens this criticism and depicts the human being as morally corrupt, thereby reinforcing reproaches already uttered by the birds and the stars. Instead of using his reason and knowledge to improve his living conditions, man turns earth into hell, and the more developed human cultures appear to be, the more they destroy. He also alludes to the poet's flying machine:

زجّ بالعلم في الفضاء طيوراً من جماد يديرها ببنانه
Man sent out his knowledge into space as birds of inanimate matter, which he revolves with his fingertips

ما بناها إلا لهدم المباني ولسفك الدماء في طيرانه
But he constructed them only to destroy buildings and shed blood during his flight

ليته لم يكن ذكياً فكل الويل في الكون من نهى إنسانه
If only he did not possess reason, since all disasters on earth result from man's intellect

With this repeated criticism of technical progress and rationalism Maʿlūf reveals an attitude to the development of human civilisations which is in many ways similar to that of the European Romantics. Even though not entirely opposed to reason (as one can see from the demand of enlightenment in the political poetry) the Romantics drew attention to the deep ambiguities hidden in a development which only seemingly leads to the benefit of mankind. In reality however, as Adorno and Horkheimer pointed out in their *Dialectics of Enlighten-*

ment, this process implies a further alienation of mankind from its authentic existence and, ultimately, self-destruction.

Finally, in the twelfth canto *(The Atonement of the Poet)*, the poet's own spirit appears and defends the human visitor. According to this spirit the poet's life on earth is only suffering and by no means voluntary. If he had the choice he would prefer the darkness of the grave, and with his enormous emotional pains he purifies his soul which had been intoxicated with material desires. The poet's spirit pleads with the other spirits to leave the poet in peace since he came to their sphere in search of a comfort granted only by his spirit:

جاء من أرضه يفتش عني يائساً فاخشعوا احتراماً ليأسه
He came from his earth full of despair and in search for me, so please be humble and respect him for his despair

ودعوه معي ففي قبلاتي شهد عطف ينسيه علقم كأسه
Let him be with me, because in my kisses is tender honey which makes him forget the bitter taste of his chalice

In the thirteenth canto *(On the Carpet of the Wind)* the poet and his spirit meet as lovers in a sphere full of passionate love. They kiss and enjoy themselves by observing human beings walking on the earth like ants. This, again, underlines the material character of the poet's journey and Maʿlūf's fascination with the possibility of flying. After this encounter the poet has to return to the realm of slavery and materiality in the fourteenth canto *(On Earth)*. Only his poetry comforts him now, the only paradisiacal and authentic element in the material world capable of rendering the poet's emotional states.

On the Carpet of the Wind is rightly regarded as one of Maʿlūf's masterpieces. For conveying his messages about the state of mankind he chose an original version of a topos which is well known in world literature. Even though his journey to the heavenly spheres depends on a sharp contrast between the material and the spiritual world, he does not operate merely with the platitudes sometimes connected with such worldviews. The emphasis on the material character of the journey and the impressively composed episodes about the inhabitants of the different spheres provide the cycle with an almost carefree atmosphere which lacks the gravity of a metaphysical and moral discourse. But Maʿlūf's lamentations and admonitions are to be taken seriously. He suffers from being a misunderstood and underestimated spirit in the

material world which grants him no comfort. But there are the heavenly spheres he retreats to with their inhabitants who are often addressed by the poet in his lonely nights. Even though Maʿlūf reveals a pessimistic worldview, it does not seem impossible to change the condition of human societies. Otherwise, any political criticism would be entirely futile. Finally, the last canto ends with a positive vision of poetry as an opportunity of retreat in the material world.

Maʿlūf's political and spiritual poems have much in common. Both convey a similar notion of exile and alienation. In both cases the poet is depicted as exiled from a home he is essentially connected to in many ways. When his fantasy or memory carries him back there, he evokes an intimate relationship which sometimes even has an erotic notion (e.g. in the encounter with his own soul in *On the Carpet of the Wind*). But it is not only an individual's home: as a Romantic poet Maʿlūf claims that it is a sphere of pure authenticity which applies to all mankind in different respects, metaphysical, moral, aesthetical, spiritual, and sensual. The poet's heightened perceptive capacities grant him access to this sphere, and his exceptional capacity of expression allows him to put his insights into words which have the potential of illuminating mankind. Ordinary people, however, are misguided and react with misunderstanding and opposition. The poet is thus faced with an eternal change between a comforting home where he is truly appreciated and a hostile place of exile. His fate is the condition of a traveller who is time and again bereft of his home and experiences deep pain; but the pain is the price he pays for being a mediator between the worlds.

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